

T H E

L O U N G E R.

[N^o XLV.]

Saturday, Dec. 10. 1785.

*Dubius sum quid faciam, inquit;
Tene relinquam, an rem.*

HOR.

MR LOUNGER,

AS my misfortune is of an uncommon nature, and occasioned by persons the least likely of any, from the high characters they bear, to do an injury to their fellow-creatures, I think myself bound, out of respect to them, to take this method of disclosing my uneasiness.

You must know, Sir, that I have a husband, who, till of late, seldom failed in any of the duties incumbent on the master of a family. He neither frequented the tavern nor the gaming-house: he was not addicted to horses or hounds, or any other expensive amusements: his pleasures lay in the circle of his family and friends: and though his usual occupations might not be deemed very important; yet they were innocent and gentleman-like, and such as he might pursue without leaving his wife and children in solitude at home. Such was Mr Feeble; though not a shining character, yet civil to his wife, kind to his children, and in all respects a decent domestic husband as any could be met with, till within these two years, that he has been introduced to a nobleman's family, within a day's journey of this city.

When he was first made acquainted there, he never staid above a night or two at a time: and, as much company frequented the house, he returned with some fresh ideas in his head; at least with a pretty exact account of all that was said or done in his presence, as he has an excellent memory for small facts, which made him for some time more acceptable and entertaining company at his own fire-side than usual. Of late, however, he has made his visits so frequent, and prolonged them so much at a time, as to neglect or forget his own family altogether: a night or two does not serve him now, it must be a fortnight or three weeks together, that he spends half a dozen times a-year at Dalville Castle. If I send at the time he appointed to return home, his answer is, "That my Lord and my Lady are so fond of him, that he must stay some days longer; he is to be on such a party with them to-morrow; the next day, there is to be company, he must help to entertain; on the third day, he is engaged to draw such a landscape for the Countess; on the day following, there is to be a concert of music, at which he must attend." In short, by his account, he is so necessary to their pleasures, or daily employments, that they can't live without him. In vain I write to him, that his affairs are in disorder; that there are letters of importance to be answered; that the

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children are become riotous and unruly; that his favourite daughter is to dance next day at a ball: nothing will do; the charm of their company is irresistible, and he remains there till some distant visit of theirs breaks up the family for a few days. My friends and neighbours express their wonder, what can detain him so long at Dalville Castle; some of them, with significant hints, that would go far to alarm a woman of less equanimity than I am. Were the good man paying his court with any view of preferment to himself, I should not grudge his absence; but I am afraid that is as little in his head as it is in theirs. Is it possible, do you think, that the Earl and Countess, sensible and accomplished as they are said to be, can find Mr Feeble so very entertaining as to compel him by their kindness to sojourn with them so long? or is it the mere love of lounging and good fare, and the vanity of being thought intimate and confidential with great people, that makes him interpret bare civility in the manner he does? Whatever it is, I know that I can get nothing in the house to please him for a week after he returns. As for myself, I should care very little about his absence, were it not for the last circumstance I mentioned, and the ridicule his conduct exposes him to. For his total indifference to me a long time past, has fully convinced me, that it is the duty of a good wife to let her husband follow his own inclination.

I am, Sir, your humble servant,

PENELOPE FEEBLE.

To Mrs Feeble's queries, we are enabled to give a pretty satisfactory answer, by the following letter from another correspondent.

MR LOUNGER,

I am very well at a great house in my neighbourhood in the country. The Earl and Countess of Dalville are not only agreeable and accomplished, but persons of the first-rate merit. My Lord was my fellow-student at college; and I should have much satisfaction in their society, were it not for a great number of insignificant and sometimes impertinent people they have about them. As the kingdom of heaven is said to be taken by violence, so the friendship and confidence of the great, at least their civilities and their time, are often gained by forwardness and assiduity, and preserved by officiousness and flattery.

I have, more than once, gone to Dalville Castle, with an intention to have passed some days there; when finding my Lord and Lady surrounded with frivolous people, and lending their ears to the most senseless adulation, I have been so indignant as to make a pretence for shortening my visit, and have summoned my carriage back within the hour. This would be no great mortification, if the conversation of this happy pair, (for happy they are, though noble and wealthy), was not of a strain above most people of their rank, the strain of superior and well cultivated understandings, were they not often obliged to reduce it to the tone of the vulgar souls they admit about them. Is it want of just discernment, or the good-nature, condescension, and politeness,

litenes, that becomes their birth, that makes them submit so tamely to the encroachments of an insipid society? Of the many evils that attend greatness, that of being obliged to be at home for half the day to every fool who has found means to be introduced, appears to me to be one of the worst. But it is increased beyond all endurance, when such persons are allowed to take possession of the dwellings of the great, and to make their quarters good as long as they please. This may be one reason, perhaps, why the great nobility in the southern part of Great Britain have generally forsaken the stately mansions of their ancient hospitality, and retreated to unsociable villas on the Thames.

My impatience on this subject, Mr Lounger, is a little exasperated by an accident that befel me a few months ago. I had devoted a fortnight to a tour of visits in the country, in which my chief object was Dalville Castle, which stands in the centre of three or four houses of my acquaintances in that part of the country. I arrived there the first day of my journey, and met with a welcome reception. Several people, as usual, dined there, and among the rest a Mr Feeble, an insignificant little soul, who is my perfect abhorrence, on account of his absurd pretensions to knowledge and taste in the Belles Lettres and the fine arts, though he is a mere shallow smatterer in them all. His chief busines is, from vacancy of mind, to go from house to house where he is acquainted, to collect unimportant domestic facts, which he retails with minute exactnes to the next family he visits. The rest of the company departed after dinner; he remained, to my great mortification. I discovered at supper that he had been there for some days, and was to stay still longer. Upon this intelligence I made a pretence of paying the rest of my visits; on which I set out in the morning, promising my Lord, when I took my leave, to lengthen my visit on my return. I passed a whole week accordingly with my other friends; but what was my surprise and mortification, when on my second arrival at Dalville Castle, the first person I met was Mr Feeble, who received me with open arms, and, with an insipid smile on his chalky visage, exclaimed, "Are you come, my dear *Moroſe*? I had thoughts of returning to town to-day; but the Countes told me yesterday, that she was sorry she would be obliged to make me change my bed, as she expected you; and she was afraid you had gone away, be-cause I had occupied your favourite and usual apartment. I told her Ladyship, that any room would serve me, and that, though I had busines in town, I liked your company so well, that I would send my servant to postpone the meeting, and stay as long as it suited you to stay. Her Ladyship nodded assent; but said, if I had busines, perhaps it would be better for me to attend to it, and she would make my excuse to you. No, no, my Lady, says I, *Moroſe* is the best company in the world, and I would not forfeit the pleasure I shall have in hearing my Lord's conversation and his, enlivened with his farcaſtical jokes, for half my estate." What was to be done in this caſe, Mr Lounger? My very blood run cold during this recital. To stay was impossible; so I made another cowardly ſhift to get away. I ordered my servant to bring me an old letter, with a

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fresh seal on it, in the time of dinner, in which I pretended I had received accounts that my wife was suddenly taken ill; and thus I escaped for once the perils of Dalville Castle, and shall not approach it again, till I hear that Mr Feeble is dead, gone beyond sea, or laid up at home with the gout.—I am, Sir, Yours,

JONATHAN MOROSE.

THE case set forth in the above letters we believe to be very common in all parts of the country where people of rank open their houses and keep good tables. The love of apparent consequence, and of real good eating, are two of the strongest appetites of man, and are equally submissive and grovelling in the attainment of their ends. No wonder that the great are flattered by those who ascribe to them every superiority of talents and qualities, in order to increase their own importance, and who extol all the luxuries of their tables, that they may constantly partake of them. If sound understandings, or feelings of delicacy, should sometimes make them proof against the adulation of their personal qualities, they will readily yield to that which is paid to their gardeners and their cooks.

As for Mrs Penelope Feeble, I am afraid her case is not very hopeful. The only advice I can offer her is, to think her husband a little more worthy of her attention, and to check that inclination which her letter seems to indicate, of diminishing him in his own eyes. I know not if she can afford to mind her housekeeping; but she may certainly command her humour, and regulate her deportment. If neither Mr Feeble's taste nor his vanity is indulged at home, she cannot wonder at the power of foreign attractions over both.

Mr Morose should know the world better, than to imagine that a person of Mr Feeble's facile and pliant disposition will not, in general, be more acceptable to the upper part of mankind than men like himself. Such persons of rank as are of weak understandings, and of slender accomplishments, have an insuperable dislike to the society of those who keep them perpetually in mind of their own inferiority; while others of superior abilities, and true greatness of mind, are frequently so self-satisfied, and so unambitious, as hardly to wish for the admiration of men of talents, which would cost them some exertions to obtain, and which is easily lost, when there are neither dependence nor hopes to preserve it: For there is scarcely one of that description who is not, what we suspect Mr Morose himself to be, more or less a kin to the *genus irritabile vatum*.

E D I N B U R G H:

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